



Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts

## **THE SIGNIFICANT OF CONTENT IN AN ARTWORK**

**Lim Ee Vee**

**Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours  
(Fine Arts)  
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# THE SIGNIFICANT OF CONTENT IN AN ARTWORK

Lim Ee Vee

This project is one of the requirements for  
Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours  
(Fine Arts)

Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts  
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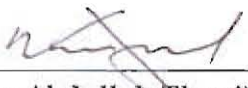
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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to recognize the significant of content in an artwork. This research will identify the basic meaning of content used and to describe the importance of experience as a key in an artwork. This study uses the direct experience and indirect experience in the development of the idea and artwork. The past life experiences has given a huge impact to every individuals and mature oneself about life. These experiences are one of the main tools in producing a work of art.

## ABSTRAK

*Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengenalpasti pengisian dalam sebuah karya seni. Kajian ini juga dilaksanakan bagi mengenalpasti makna asas kandungan yang digunakan, pengisian dalam konteks pengalaman dan menggambarkan betapa pentingnya pengalaman dalam sebuah karya seni. Penghasilan karya dalam kajian ini menggunakan pengalaman secara langsung dan tidak langsung. Pengalaman hidup yang lepas memberi impak kepada setiap individu dan mematangkan lagi diri seseorang tentang kehidupan. Di samping itu, pengalaman tersebut adalah salah satu alat utama dalam penghasilan sesebuah karya.*

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Research

The aim of this research is to understand the importance of content in an artwork. The context of the research is mainly describing the significant of content in an artwork. It is also considered mainly to find out the use of experience as content by the artist in the artwork.

Art is an expression of idea and emotion and also a reaction to the world that foster the artist. It is important to know that a work of art can be attributed to things like experiencing the surrounding, history, culture, politic and even religion. Whereas the content in the sense of speaking the emotional or intellectual message of an artwork. It is the expression, critical meaning, significance, fundamental or aesthetic value of an artwork which brings the viewer closer to what the artist wants to deliver.

The life experience of the artist is one of the most used tools in producing an artwork (Lewis and Lewis, 2009). One's experience can lead to the development of coming out with an idea in the process of producing a work of art. In addition, the work of art has the power to change the way a person think and understand about a certain situation or an object.

There are many artists which artworks have content in it which wants to convey something to the audiences. Sometimes, the message conveyed through the work of art will be different from the perceiver's interpretation. Russell (1993) mentioned that it is a common situation where the artist and the observer have different interpretation because everyone observed the world differently.

According to Barkan (1966), he believes that the content is an important aspect of work within art. A work of art can be declared as valuable when there is content in it or message. Therefore, the result of the finding is then being analyzed and applied onto the artwork and will relate with the content chosen.



## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Carroll (1999, pg. 30) stated that “Many contemporary artists aspire to create works of an art that are designed to defy interpretation or to be utterly meaningless.” On the other hand, according to Smith and Wilde (2002, pg. 4), “a great deal of contemporary artwork is meaningless and even valueless without direct recourse to some theoretical context.” This also can we explain that when there is a context, there will be content and content plays an important role in producing an artwork. Therefore, it is believe that an artwork which consists of content will be valuable. Through the statement stated above, there arise few questions which are:

- i. Why is content being used in an artwork?
- ii. What is the source of inspiration for an artist in producing an artwork?
- iii. How important content is in producing an artwork?

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

The objective of this research is to ensure the purpose of this study being accomplished. The scope of this study is divided into three parts; this is to ensure that the focus of the study did not deviate from the main purpose of the study. Therefore, below are the objectives:

- i. To identify the needs of content in artwork on context of experience.
- ii. To analyze the content or subject based of artworks among selected artworks or artists.
- iii. To apply the findings based on the above analysis to personal artwork.

The first research objective is to identify basic meaning of content in a work and the use of experience in an artwork. The main focus of this research is to those who use experience as the research subject. Furthermore, this research is not only focus on a particular discipline, it can me in any form for example it can be installation art, painting, photography, hybrid and others.

The second objective is a process where a data collection process to analyze the content or subject based of the artworks among few selected artists or artworks. Besides that, this research will also get the interpretations done by artists, writers, authors, art critics and others which related to a certain work.

The last objective is the application process of the art approaches which related to the findings of experience as a process in producing an artwork. It is also considered the process of developing the idea to a certain understanding in approaching the work of art. Aesthetic and life experiences are used to build the context and at the same time the experience in the making of the work will gain indirectly.

#### **1.4 Significant of the Study**

This research is conducted due to identifying the needs of content in every work of art based on theories, philosophies and some artworks. The approach can be different and that does not matter as long as to clarify the importance of the subject in artworks. This research also includes the aspect of past life experience with will be part of the needs in coming out with an idea or in producing a piece of work.

Besides, the minor part of this research is to convey the idea or message in the approach of installation form. Installation kind of work creates and transforms a certain space which will bring the audiences closer to the work and think about what the artist wish to express.

These aspects are considered as a priority for the researcher to measure on the significant of content in an artwork and also the effectiveness of delivering an idea or message through the work for the perceivers. Hence, this study also will determine a work with a subject will be more valuable compared with a work with no meaning in the context of content, context and concept.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This topic will discuss about the related information towards the subject selected which is more on the significant of content in developing and producing an artwork. The main focus is on the study of scholarly journals, books, consequently research, particular issue, theory, philosophy and critical evaluation of each work. These references are used in order to get overviews of the significant literature on the content as a tool in producing a work of art and the content used in the artwork.

### **2.2 Understanding Content**

It is important which the subject matter of art can be understood by the audience. Context can be briefly described as the purpose of artwork is made. Besides, this could include historical information on the artist or issues or things the artist references. Whereas for the content speaks the emotional or intellectual message of an artwork. The expression, essential meaning, significance, or aesthetic value of an artwork normally brings the audience closer to what the artist wants to deliver.

According to Richardson (1992), the content of a photo is about something which is the subject matter. He then explains again where content has further meaning, which is the subject matter has a meaning, a theme, and the meaning is a part of the total content of the artwork. Iconography which is a whole branch of art history concerned with content in it. Iconography will also be told as the subject matter or the symbolic representational.

According to Russell (1993) there are many kind of meaning in art. It is a reflection of the fact that art is an expression of thought or emotion and also a response to the world that nurtured the artist. One of the meanings is related to the practical purpose of art which is symbolism. Another meaning in art is to be found in the individual approach of the artist.

It is because everybody observes the world differently; it is a reflection of the artist's perception, insights and experience.

Vos, K. (2002) mentioned in *Symbolism & Simplicity* that the interest in traditional Korean art is today unprecedented in both the East and West. Work of artist Won-Kyung Cho's portrays Korean art at its most characteristic in the terms of content. The cultivation and formal symbolism of aristocratic arts typify the strict Confucian society that has evolved in Korea. The use of symbolism in every work of art is about something for example a lotus flower, for instance, may symbolize the Buddhist ideal of purity as well as human fertility when portray with mandarin ducks.

Paoletti & Radke (2005), mentioned that art is not just beautiful; it is meaningful, purposeful and functional. The content mentioned in this book are more on the societal values that highlights the innovations and exceptional quality of those works that have dominated historical discussion since the sixteenth century.

Based on Iosifidis (2009), the work of arts reveal more on the message that the artist wants to speak not through words but by the work itself. The idea and information is clearly shown through the artwork. The way of approaching is more on the artist's life and experience.

While for Lai, S. (2007), both the context and content are being portrayed in art of China at the contemporary period. Mostly the issues are about the critic of a subject matter. They use many different types of approaches towards the artwork such as performance art which contact with audience and video art.

Artist such as Octavio Ocampo, Lori Earley, Dariusz Zawadzki and Aleksander Balos by Beinart, J. (2008), the inspiration often comes from the personal and aesthetic experiences. Zawadzki used to observe the world, its people, and their extreme fluctuating emotions. This is one of the important process in building up the idea. Adding on with Heidi Taillefer, most of the work of art by the artist is about what would appear to be inevitable marriage of technology with biology, mostly addresses current and critical questions. The echo of technology as a language representative has been sustained in his work of our era.

Furthermore, Satoshi Sakamoto's paintings titled *Roengi* (1994-95) (see *Figure 2.1*) and *Vankinazma* (1996-99) (see *Figure 2.2*) are mostly reflects his experiences derived from karma, rooted in the duality between man and woman, mortals and nature, killer and victim (Beinart, 2008). Sakamoto uses pure forms and colour of representation in his works of art.

While for artist Frank Kortan, in his work of *The Lady With A Chameleon and A Bottle of Soda* (2000) (see *Figure 2.3*) the intention is to let the audience go into his private world of dreams and imagination to stimulate and extend his fantasies (Biernat, 2008).



*Figure 2.1: Roengi, Satoshi Sakamoto, 1994-95 (Source: Beinart. J. (2008). Metamorphosis 2: 50 Contemporary Surreal, Fantastic and Visionary Artists. Australia: beinArt)*





Figure 2.2: *Vankimazma*, Satoshi Sakamoto, 1996-99 (Source: Beinart, J. (2008). *Metamorphosis 2: 50 Contemporary Surreal, Fantastic and Visionary Artists*. Australia: beinArt)



Figure 2.3: *The Lady with A Chameleon and A Bottle of Soda*, Frank Kortan, 2000 (Source: Beinart, J. (2008). *Metamorphosis 2: 50 Contemporary Surreal, Fantastic and Visionary Artists*. Australia: beinArt)



According to Chun, Kim and Kim (1994) mentioned in *Art Vivant series* that artist Professor Yoo's earlier work are based on her personal experiences since her childhood until the current days, at the same time this doesn't mean that it is pure content. The conceptual level is equally considered if the design of her object is refined.

On the other hand, according to Suh, Y. (1994), in the process of transformation, artist Yong-Sun Suh's life experience has become one of the important elements in it. The reality of disharmonious and tense resistances to such pressure pushes the limits for him to come out with the idea. Suh wants to tell completely the beliefs that portray the life experience and not just the artwork itself.

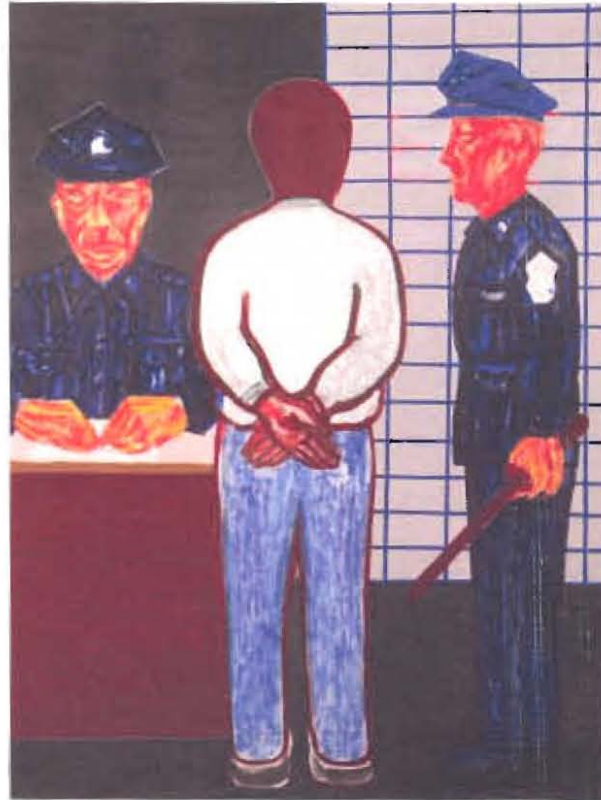


Figure 2.4: *The Arrested Man*, Yong-Sun Suh, 2003 (Source: Suh, Y. (1994). *Art vivant: Contemporary Korean artists / Yong-Sun Suh* (Vol. 49). Seoul: Sigonsa)

Besides, a simple subject matter will be used over and over again to realize gradually the original motif through a prolonged tension between himself and his painting.

Suh's work can be defined as intellectual yet sentimental, ordinary yet universal, and cognitive yet existential.

### **2.3 Theoretical and Philosophical Study**

A theory presents a systematic way of understanding events, behaviors and/or situations. Besides, a theory is a set of interrelated concepts, definitions, and propositions that explains or predicts events or situations by specifying relations among variables. Much research is clear about the theories being used, and the ways they are applied within the formation of the project.

Based on Dilworth (2007) stated that the significance of content in artworks are artistic exposition by the artist and it is defined as the content theory of art. Content views of language communication are everywhere, so they can be applied in artistic cases as well. Besides, two kinds of content which can be used in explaining artworks are the proposition expressed by a sentence and the worldly state of affairs it represents. This is called the propositional accounts of language.

According to Dewey (1981) theory, Dewey's effort is to transform the understandings of what is important about the art process from its physical manifestations in the 'expressive object' to the process in its entirety, a process whose fundamental element is no longer the material 'work of art' but rather the development of an 'experience'. An experience that one goes through is something that personally influences one's life.

The works of art materials that come from a public world and it arouse new perceptual experience of the meanings of that world, organically connecting the individual and the universal. In addition, the work of art is representative, it tells people about the nature of experience (Dewey, 1934).

All artworks require interpretations. When there is an interpretation, then it must be about something. Therefore, all artworks are about something which brings to the content of the whole (Carroll, 2012). It mentioned that neo-representationalism is much seems built into the concept or the definition of an interpretation. It means, it is necessary condition of

interpretation that the object of interpretation has a subject about which it makes some comments. An interpretation is just the specification of that content.

“This is a strong argument in favor of neo-representationalism. Moreover, it should be clear that neo-representationalism is superior to the representational theory of art, since it is a broader theory. The central defining property of art that it purposes – bring about something – is more comprehensive than the one advanced by the representational theory – standing for something else.”  
(2012, Page 29)

According to Nicholas Davey (as cited in Macleod, K., 2013) that if an artwork addresses us, there are addresses about something. This brings us to the question of subject matter. Interpretation is a means to a work's realization; therefore subject matter in which aesthetic and *theoria* is both important in a work. Furthermore, an artwork can be understood by discussion and understanding towards the work of art. Through the understanding in arts, audience will be able to make interpretation according to their understanding. Sometimes, the interpretation made by the artist will not be accepted by the viewers.

Smith (1996) felt that artists used an engaged, participatory method of working whereby their experiences become the content of their work. John Dewey (as cited in Smith, 1996) took this idea even farther when he said that viewer of the work of art must recreate or emotionally and intellectually engage in the artist's creating process. For Dewey the creative process was experienced twice, first by the artist in the creation of the work, and second by the viewer in his experiencing of the work.

Based on the theory of Erwin Panofsky, there are three levels in art historical understanding for iconography which are identification, description and interpretation of the work of art. Iconography is also a question on dealing with the object or subject and the meaning behind it.

According to Crowther, P. (1993) argued that art and aesthetic experiences have the magnitude to humanize. In the making of art, conveys sensible or imaginative matter into the form of symbolic, coordinates and conserves the unique and the generalities in human experience. The basic need of fundamental to self-consciousness is the aesthetic domain

answers itself, and art is the highest realization of such needs. It is important to understand that in the formation and reception of art the represent subject is fully at home with his or her environment.

Kastner & Wallis, (1998), environmental art may be gallery-based or situated in the natural environment. It may be site-specific, which means that the artwork and the site are of equal importance in the work. "Space is the fundamental in any form of command life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power"

Soo Sunny Park's installation *Unwoven Light* transforms the expensive space of gallery to life. *Unwoven Light* continues Park's ongoing experimentation with the ephemeral qualities of light and how light affects our perceptions of architectural space. Each visitor's experience of *Unwoven Light* will be unique, depending upon the time of day, ratio of natural to artificial light, precise angle of viewing, and even the number of people in the gallery. It is possible for two people to stand next to one another and each have a completely different experience of the dynamic presence of light (Soo Sunny Park *Unwoven Light*, 2013). An artist has to stay true and take great care with their works.

"If you want to be a great artist, use what you are passionate about internally. It has to be draw from oneself, not from what other people are doing. That is number one. And take great care with your work. Be meticulous, take the time, make it your best. The combination of that care, attention, work ethic, and authenticity is a really strong formula" (Bailes, 2013).



*Figure 2.5. Unwoven Light, Soo Sunny Park, 2013 (Source: Soo Sunny Park Unwoven Light (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.ricegallery.org/soo-sunny-park/>)*

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

This topic will describe about the process in collecting data and the study. There are two types of methods which are the qualitative and quantitative. In conducting this study, a qualitative methodology scope will be used by the researcher due to a better understanding about the scope of research. The reason of carrying the qualitative method is to identify that specific outcome by the study of the title. The qualitative method by collecting the data which supports the research title, the researcher will then have a clear idea of what content will be used in producing the artwork. The scope of theoretical and philosophical which will support much on proving the research objectives. Relevant references such as books, journals, articles and internet information will be used to have a better understanding on the topics related.

### 3.2 Research Strategy

This study is carry out to achieve the objectives of this research which are to identify the needs of content in artwork on context of experience, to analyze the content or subject based of artworks among selected artworks or artists and to transfer the findings to the personal artwork. Qualitative method is used mostly in this study to gather relevant information. There are five phases in part, Table 3.1 as below.



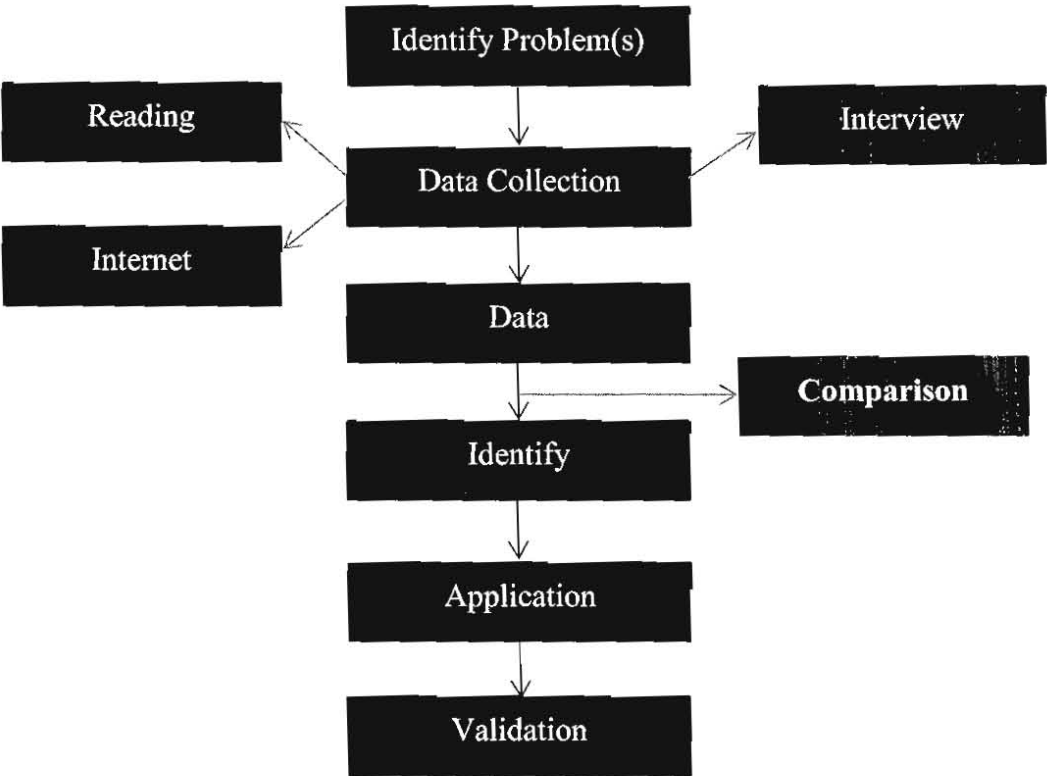
Table 3.1: Research Strategy

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
Literature Review	Data Collection	Analyzation	Interpretation	Application
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Theories</li><li>- Philosophies</li><li>- Artworks</li><li>- Artists</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Artworks</li><li>- Context of experience</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Personal work</li></ul>

3.2.1 Data Gathering

In this section, it's a process on the way data is collected. Table 3.2 below shows the structure of data gathering procedure.

Table 3.2: Data Gathering Procedures



First of all, by identifying the problem is the first step of this research. Identify the problem which concern most. Once the problem has been identified, data collection process will be done through all those related materials.

There are two parts in data collection which is primary and secondary to explanations on the study and clarifying on the definition of content. Primarily this research uses informal interview through the social media such as e-mail. Another part is will be used for data collection is the secondary sources of informative materials by looking in to books, journals and internet information to understand the meaning of content. Besides, supporting theories and philosophies study are important as well.

Once the data is collected, process of identify the significance of content in an artwork through reading materials need to be done. Comparisons between artworks and the suitable reference artists or artworks which use experience as their content or message in their artworks will be identify and clarify. In this part, methods of qualitative are used mostly. This is to clarify the category of content used by the artist in an artwork.

By applying the data collection to the personal work to then see if the findings are valid.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This topic will explain further regarding to the outcome of the findings. It has a relation with the combination of the research objectives. Besides that, here will also explain the processes in the making of the work according to the research objectives as well as the significant of the experience as part of the content development. Additionally, this topic also will talk about the suggestions and comments from the viewers and lecturers towards the work to improvise and strengthen for the final work. This research topic describes about the selection of research subject. Based on the objectives that have been stated, methods and approaches used in the study of subject to give a clearer idea and picture to the viewer and the acceptance of it. This research is carry to focus on the importance of content and the use of experience in an artwork.

### **4.2 The Needs of Content**

Smith and Wilde (2002) did mention a great contemporary work of art has to have at least a direct recourse to some theoretical context. Content is an important aspect in a work which is the subject matter and this is clarified by Richardson (1992). The subject matter is always about something, a theme or a meaning, and it is a part of the work itself. Besides, according to Dilworth (2007) the significance of content in works are artistic interpretation by the artist and it is defined as the content theory of art. This shows content is needed in every work of art and without content, the work of art will be valueless.

To further strengthen the point, in Dewey's theory he stated that all works of art require interpretation and when there occur an interpretation, there must be about something. Same goes to Davey's theory, where discusses about subject matter. When a work addresses us, there are addresses about something and this brings us to the question of subject matter. Additionally, Crowther (1993) explains art and aesthetic experiences

have the capacity to humanize, generally is human experiences and it is the representation subject of the environment.

Smith mentioned that the artists usually have an engaged, participatory method of working which their experiences become the content of their work (Smith, 1996). John Dewey (as cited in Smith, 1996) took this idea even further when he said that viewer of the work of art must recreate or emotionally and intellectually engage in the artist's creating process. For Dewey the creative process was experienced twice, first by the artist in the creation of the work, and second by the viewer in his experiencing of the work.

#### **4.3 The Content or Subject Based of Artworks**

This research collects information and records the reference artist's work which uses experience in their works or in the process of developing the idea for the work of art. There are works which produced by few artists who uses experience in life as their subject or content in the particular artwork. Those artists are Satoshi Sakamoto, Lizzy Yoo and Yong-Sun Suh. But will go to the discussion about the significance of content with qualitative materials to support the research in theoretical context.

Based on the paintings titled *Roengi* (1994-95) and *Vankinazma* (1996-99) by mostly reflects his experiences derived from karma, rooted in the duality between man and woman, mortals and nature, killer and victim. Sakamoto uses pure forms and colour of representation in his works of art. Professor Yoo's earlier work are based on her personal experiences since her childhood until the current days, at the same time this doesn't mean that it is pure content. The conceptual level is equally considered if the design of her object is refined.

On the other hand, the reference artist chosen is Yong-Sun Suh. In the process of transformation, Yong-Sun Suh's life experience has become one of the important elements in it. Suh wants to tell completely the beliefs that portray the life experience and not just the artwork itself. In the work of Suh's titled *The Arrested Man* (2003), it briefly describes that the cops and criminals are shown in the New York subway, the fact that the society has to be controlled by the invisible force.